



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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1986's CAPTIVE-BRED EAGLES TO SOAR IN FOUR STATES; DU PONT ANNOUNCES FOURTH GRANT TO SUPPORT PROGRAM

Three young bald eagles destined for new homes in Tennessee got an official send-off today from Interior Secretary Don Hodel near the Chesapeake Bay, where the National Symbol is flourishing.

The three birds are among the most recent graduates of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, where eagle chicks are produced at a captive-breeding facility supported by continuing donations from the Du Pont Company. The purpose of the program is to restore bald eagles in States where their populations remain low. A total of eight eaglets form this year's class, and they are headed for release sites in North Carolina (two birds), New Jersey (two birds), and Pennsylvania (one bird), in addition to west Tennessee's "Land Between the Lakes" region.

Hodel brought the trio to Remington Farms, a Du Pont-managed wildlife demonstration area near Chestertown, Maryland, where an active eagle nest holding two fledgling bald eagles is located. Nearby, on private property, another eagle pair has produced four young this season. Biologists believe this nest is one of the few instances in the Lower 48 States where so many chicks have been hatched at one time.

Du Pont Chairman Richard E. Heckert announced that the company will contribute an additional \$50,000 to the Patuxent program in 1986, bringing to \$200,000 the total Du Pont has contributed to bald eagle recovery since 1983.

Hodel praised Du Pont's record of support for endangered species such as the bald eagle, in keeping with the spirit of the Reagan Administration's "Take Pride in America" campaign to foster a renewed sense of responsibility for the protection of natural resources by private citizens and major corporations alike. "Du Pont has been showing its pride in America's wildlife legacy for years. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's longest continuing financial partner in wildlife conservation projects of this type, and the fruits of that relationship are what you see soaring above you in the skies overhead," Hodel said.

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Hodel contrasted the increasing eagle population in the Chesapeake Bay region with the continuing need for human help to restore eagles in other parts of the country. "Patuxent is where most of our action is on bald eagle propagation and research, but here is where the payoff occurs," Hodel said at the Remington Farms news conference today. "In the Chesapeake Bay, and at other locations around the Nation, the species is rebounding at a remarkable rate. But in other areas, there are still few eagle pairs and their rate of reproduction is low. The support we've received from Du Pont through the years is helping bring eagles back so that more people can enjoy seeing wild bald eagles as we do here at the Chesapeake Bay."

The Chesapeake Bay region, which includes sections of Maryland, Virginia, and Delaware, held 90 successful bald eagle nests in 1985 that produced 163 young, according to surveys by the National Wildlife Federation's Institute for Wildlife Research. By comparison, in 1977 there were only 40 successful nests in the area, producing 63 young. Biologists credit the increase to continuing bald eagle restocking efforts throughout the Mid-Atlantic region, the Bay's abundant supply of food, and secure eagle wintering and nesting habitat at Federal and State wildlife refuges and private areas like Remington Farms. The disruption of the species' natural reproduction by now-banned harmful pesticides such as DDT is also diminishing.

"Our support of the American bald eagle is really an extension of a broad corporate commitment at Du Pont," said Heckert. "We have always believed we have a responsibility not only to protect but also to enhance the environment."

Du Pont funds have allowed the Patuxent facility, near Laurel, Maryland, to boost its total number of breeding bald eagle pairs from eight in 1982 to 15 in 1986. Last year, 15 eaglets were produced for return to the wild in seven States.

The three 10-week-old eaglets present for today's announcement are now en route to their release sites in the Volunteer State. There, they will be briefly housed in lofty cages known as "hack towers," where they will gradually acclimate to their new surroundings. Through the "hacking" process, the flightless birds are fed by biologists until the time when they are freed from their cages. Slowly, as the birds learn to fly, biologists reduce their food until the eagles learn to hunt and scavenge for themselves.

In a second method used by Patuxent to restore young eagles to the wild known as "fostering," 2-to-3-week-old chicks are placed in the natural nests of adult bald eagle pairs that either have produced infertile eggs or no eggs at all. These eaglets are readily adopted by their unsuspecting foster parents.

In areas where natural eagle reproduction has revived, such as in the Chesapeake Bay, hope for the bald eagle lies in careful monitoring by biologists, a continuing supply of prime nesting areas, and protection from vandalism and illegal shooting -- still the greatest cause of bald eagle mortality in the United States. The two naturally-produced young eagles on the Remington property are 10 weeks old and expected to be flying soon. The birds, thought to be a male and a female, have been equipped with radio transmitters so biologists can monitor their daily movements.

The bald eagle is listed as a Federal "endangered" or "threatened" species throughout the Lower 48 States. Nearly 6,000 bald eagles, including about 1,500 breeding pairs, are estimated to live in the Lower 48 year-round.